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Title: Women's Reservation Bill.

SHRIMATI JHANSI LAKSHMI BOTCHA (BOBBILI): Mr. Chairman, Sir, on 8 th March, 2008, throughout the country we have celebrated Women's Day with much fanfare but it has not been reflected on the ground as we could not voice our concern in the House on that day as it happened to be a Saturday. Despite the goal of reserving one-third of the seats in Parliament and State Legislatures for women, it continues to be elusive. We know that the Women's Reservation Bill was first introduced in Parliament in 1996. However, with diverse objections from political quarters, the Bill remained a nonstarter. I am happy to learn that the UPA Government has declared that the Bill, which is a priority in the Common Minimum Programme, would be passed.

I regret to say that in a progressive democracy like India only 8.3 per cent of the Members of Parliament are women, according to data published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

Based on the positive experience of reservation for women in Panchayats and urban local bodies, reservation in Parliament and State Legislatures will work strongly to the advantage of women. In a tradition-bound society, if more women are elected to positions of power, the problems that continue to afflict women, such as oppression, domestic violence, discrimination and the lack of opportunities, can be solved. Political empowerment is the only panacea for these society-driven evils. We are only pleading for extension of reservation from Panchayat to Parliament.

I would request political parties – which are resisting this Bill – to set aside their differences and work together to make the just representation of women in Parliament and in State Legislatures a reality by ensuring the immediate passage of this important piece of legislation. Thank you.